

## Linda Margaret Potter

10 December 1919 - February 2009

If one word could describe Margaret Potter it would have to be 'involvement', which makes her death doubly sad in that she died alone during the extreme heat wave that preceded the Black Saturday bush-fires. Whatever she undertook she always carried out with dedication, precision and enthusiasm.

Linda Margaret Potter (known to everyone as Margaret, the Linda disguised always under an initial) was born on 10 December 1919. She was educated at Presbyterian Ladies College, returning there to teach, and ultimately becoming senior chemistry mistress. When she retired in 1980 she joined the ex-collegiate group, in which she was very active. Teaching was in her blood, and when her great-nephews Sam and Bennett began school, she was dissatisfied with the way they were being taught to read, and promptly set about making sure they had a good grounding in this skill. She wanted to do the same thing when they started to learn chemistry, but admitted ruefully that teaching methods and the state of knowledge had changed since her day.

On her retirement she also joined the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV), being elected in August 1980. She was a Council member from 1983-1986, and in 1985 was elected chairperson of the Botany Group, a position she held until 1990. Margaret was an inspirational leader, and the Botany Group was most active during her tenure.

Meetings were well-attended, and excursions near and far were organised: to places such as Brimbank Park and the Organ Pipes National Park, Kinglake National Park, Lake Mountain, Phillip Island, the Otways and the Grampians, and the Mornington Peninsula, to remove bone-seed. This was the period when the campaign to conserve Courtney's Road, Belgrave South, got under way, due to the efforts of members of the Botany Group. The area is now the Baluk Willam Nature Conservation Reserve. When, in 1987, the FNCV received a request to help



Margaret Potter at Maranoa Gardens, 1990

preserve the Knox Horticultural Research land, which was under threat of development, it was Margaret who wrote letters to the relevant minister and local member on behalf of the club.

Margaret was always punctilious about drawing the attention of the Botany Group to relevant matters from Council minutes, and General Meetings, for example, preparing a summary sheet in 1989 on the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*, following a talk on the subject at a General Meeting. She regularly attended General Meetings, providing exhibits and nature notes, often about things she had observed in her own garden or local parks. After an excursion to the Ada

Tree in 1989 she talked to a General meeting about the importance of its preservation, and the meeting approved the sending of a letter to the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands urging this. In 1990 she coordinated the FNCV display at the Maranoa Gardens Festival.

The late 1980s were troubled times in the club, in particular due to the shortcomings of the Subscription Secretary. In 1991 Margaret volunteered to sort out the confusion that had ensued, and spent eight hours a week for two years dealing with the complexities of the membership records. In recognition of this she was made an Honorary Member. When, in 1993, Council decided to advertise for a Subscription Secretary, Margaret wrote a detailed report on what was involved, pointing out firmly that six hours a week was not enough. For the following three years she acted as the club's Publicity Officer, ensuring that, among other outlets, notice of the club's activities appeared regularly in *The Age*.

Margaret's involvement in the club was more on the organisational side of things, but in 1984 she led a Day Group excursion to Bellbird Dell Reserve bushland, and in 1995 gave a talk to the Botany Group, entitled 'Kosciusko in Summer'. The latter was her last recorded activity, but for some years she was a familiar figure, with her smile and cheerful enthusiasm, at meetings, including the annual Australian Natural History Medallion reception and presentation.

I am indebted to Beryl Fookes for some of the above information.

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### One Hundred Years Ago

The nest of another Scrub-Robin was found by Mr. M'Lennan, who knows the habits of these birds thoroughly. It was a simple cup-shaped structure of sticks and small twigs set into the ground, and contained a solitary egg, the usual clutch of this bird. Our guide has nicknamed this bird "the trapper's companion" on account of its inquisitiveness, sociability, and fearlessness when he has been out quietly setting traps for Dingoes and other vermin. They are fairly tame so long as no noise is made, but directly they hear a sound they disappear at once, only to reappear when all is still again. Sometimes the nest is built amongst the bark or debris at the base of a mallee bush, and at times is situated quite 18 inches from the ground. When returning to the nest after having been frightened these birds adopt a coquetting action, approaching within a yard or two of it then rapidly darting away into the scrub, only to repeat the same performance immediately afterwards. One has only to possess a little patience and keep quiet and the Scrub-Robin will show exactly where the egg or young one, as the case may be, is located ...

Several nests of the Graceful Honey-eater, *Ptilotis ornata*, were also found, while many Spiny-checked Honey-eaters were seen feeding in the tree-tops. Restless Flycatchers, *Sisura inquieta*, and Red-capped Robins, *Pelrceca goodenovii*, were also seen, busily engaged building their nests. Evidence of the presence of Emus, indicated by tufts of feathers, were seen in many places. Unharnessing our horses, we fastened them up, and then went for a long tramp over sand dunes covered with pines' and scrub. The pad led us to a beautifully green oval space of about ten acres, named by Mr. M'Lennan "the Dingoes' recreation reserve." Here we espied a fox, and presently a Dingo. Probably both of these have by this time yielded their scalps to our guide, who claims to have accounted for the deaths of close on 3,000 Dingoes. Several Mallee-Fowls' nests were inspected, and additional notes on the habits of other birds were made. Many Chestnut-rumped Ground-Wrens were seen in this part.

From *The Victorian Naturalist* XXVI, p. 70-71, 73, October 1909